

Twenty-three reported dead in new US-British attacks on Iraq

David Walsh
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The official Iraqi news agency reported that 23 people were killed and 11 wounded when American and British warplanes targeted a playing field near the northern Iraqi town of Mosul on Tuesday. The agency denounced the bombing as “another vile crime carried out by the United States and its ally Britain” against Iraq’s people.

A leading Iraqi newspaper blamed the United Nations Security Council, accusing it of turning a blind eye to the US-British assault. The paper, *al-Thawra*, said Security Council members “also bear moral responsibility because they have been silent toward the new aggression.”

American and British spokesmen denied the charge and blamed the deaths on Iraqi surface-to-air missiles going astray. US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said, “The coalition aircraft did not fire in response and in the event anyone was killed it was undoubtedly the result of misdirected ground fire that ended up in a location that was not intended.”

Iraq’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Najji Sabri, ridiculed the denials, saying, “The American and British governments are known for their lies and distortion of facts.”

According to the Iraqis, US and British warplanes carried out more than 32,000 sorties between December 1998, when Iraq announced it would begin firing at hostile jets patrolling the so-called “no-fly” zones in the north and south of the country, and June 2001. The US boasts that 200,000 flights have been made over Iraq in the decade since the end of the Persian Gulf War—at a cost of \$1 billion.

Baghdad claims that 350 Iraqis have been killed and more than 1,000 wounded in raids by US and British planes since December 1998.

American and British officials acknowledge that their

planes have killed numerous Iraqi civilians in the past. A cynical BBC report, headlined “Iraqi Deaths Blamed on ‘Friendly Fire,’” notes toward the end: “London and Washington say the high numbers of civilian casualties from allied retaliation in previous incidents is because the Iraqi authorities station their air defences in civilian areas.”

Sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1991 have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, children in particular. According to statistics accepted by the UN, more than 250 Iraqi children die each day because of malnutrition and the absence of basic health care services.

There is good reason to believe that the most recent attack on Iraq is bound up with US attempts to overcome difficulties on the diplomatic front by creating a military provocation.

The Bush administration, faced with the reality, almost universally accepted, that US policy toward Iraq has failed, recently proposed a change in the sanctions system. Rejecting Iraq’s demand for the immediate lifting of sanctions, and calls from China, Russia and France for an early end to the sanctions regime, the US and Britain are proposing, in the name of “smart sanctions,” continued vetting of a wide range of imports into the country. Washington and London submitted to the UN Security Council a 23-page list of banned or “suspect” items that included almost all computer and telecommunications equipment. To date China, Russia and France have blocked this plan in the Security Council.

Frustration on the diplomatic front, far from lessening the danger of US military aggression against Iraq, heightens it. On June 4, as a protest against the continuation of sanctions, Iraq announced it would cease exporting oil. On the same day, US Defense

Secretary Rumsfeld issued a warning that improved Iraqi air defenses represented an increasing threat to US and British pilots. Col. Maury Forsyth, the US officer who draws up the allied flight plans for the northern no-fly zone, told the *Associated Press*, “With every day that goes by, the odds ... of losing an aircraft go up.” Saddam Hussein, he declared, “is doing everything he can to shoot us down.”

Such statements should be taken as a warning that Washington and London are deliberately provoking Iraq and will respond to the shooting down of a US or British plane, or any other attempt by Iraqi forces to defend themselves, as the pretext for another military adventure.



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